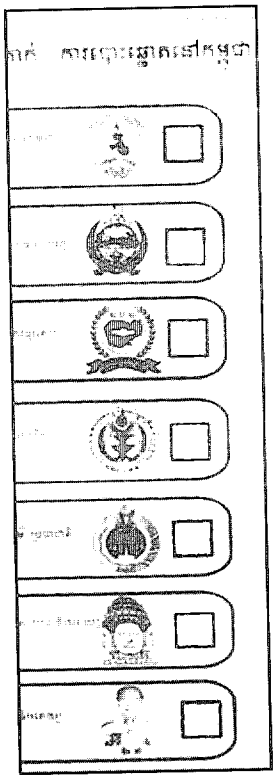
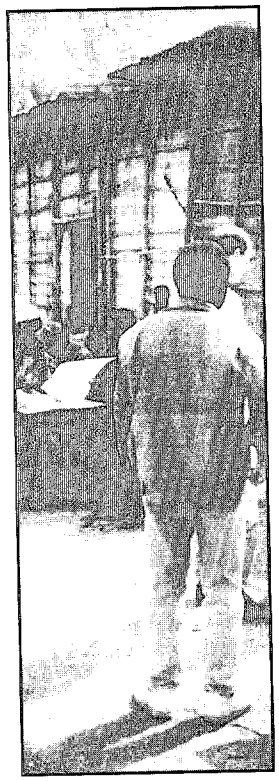
# FROM BULLETS TO BALLOTS

## ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE TO POSTCONFLICT SOCIETIES





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# Acknowledgments

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CDIE organized a workshop on November 14–16, 1996, that brought together a core group of people to discuss the case studies. The discussants—Tom Beyer, Horacio Boneo, Charles Costello, Terrence Lyons, and Mark Schneider—provided valuable insight based on their own expertise. Contributions were also made by other participants, including Todd Amani, John Anderson, Murl Baker, Rick Barton, Gwen Bevis, Harry Blair, Polly Byers, Andy Castonguay, Nadereh Chahmirzadi, Clinton Doggett, Dina Esposito, Elizabeth Fetter, Judy Gilmore, Michael Henning, Gerald Hyman, Keith Klein, Scott Lansell. Daniel Lesmez, Michael Magan, Heather McHugh, Ned McMahon, Johanna Mendelson, Deborah Mendelson, Norman Olsen, Jeanne Pryor, Kathleen Smith, Ed Stewart, Charles Stonecipher, George Vickers, Richard Whelden, Jennifer Windsor, and Amy Young.

*Cambodian ballot and photographs of a rally in Nicaragua and voting in Ethiopia on cover, courtesy of International Foundation for Election Systems.*

I am also grateful to Thomas Carothers at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for sponsoring a half-day session to discuss a paper in which I outlined a set of lessons based on a comparative analysis of the case studies. A group of prominent experts on elections and war-torn societies—including Nicole Ball, Santiago Canton, Betsy Clark, Jeff Fischer, Steve Griner, Patrick Merloe, Tim Reiser, Nicholas van de Walle, and George Vickers—participated in this workshop, which helped to shape our thinking on the subject.

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Finally, I wish to thank my former colleague Carolyn Knapp, who assisted me throughout the conduct of this evaluation with remarkable skill and efficiency.

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# Foreword

***In 1996, USAID initiated a program of evaluation studies to examine the roles that international assistance plays in the democratic reconstruction of postconflict societies.***

The studies are designed to draw policy and programmatic lessons, which can be used by USAID and other donor agencies to develop and implement their assistance programs in postconflict situations. The framework for these evaluations was initially articulated in *Rebuilding Societies After Civil Wars,* which was edited by Krishna Kumar and published by Lynne Rienner in 1996.

*From Bullets to Ballots* presents the findings of the first program evaluation undertaken in this series. The study looks generally at elections held after the signing of a peace accord. These elections are often critical to the political reconciliation of war-torn societies. They are designed to settle the contentious issue of political legitimacy: ballots, not bullets, should determine who represents the people and who governs the country. Moreover, in countries where a constitutional framework for democracy does not exist, those elected in a postconflict election are often given the critical chore of drafting a new constitution. Finally, "free and fair" elections can open a window of opportunity for the further democratization and reconciliation of these societies.

The report examines three areas: the planning, conduct, and outcome of postconflict elections; the role of international electoral assistance; and the effects of elections on subsequent democratization and reconciliation processes. The study draws from a series of in-depth analyses of postconflict elections in six countries (Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua) commissioned by USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE). The case studies were prepared by eminent scholars who had the opportunity to observe firsthand the elections under consideration and who used a common framework in conducting their analyses. Krishna Kumar, who is leading the overall evaluation for CDIE, and Marina Ottaway, a political scientist and author of one of the country studies, deserve considerable credit for synthesizing the various experiences reported in each of the case studies, as well as incorporating information from other postconflict elections.

The authors have identified many important lessons and have proposed precise recommendations. As the study demonstrates, postconflict

elections are not a panacea. The political and practical challenges that must be overcome to ensure a positive outcome are enormous. Moreover, as recent events in Cambodia illustrate, the risks of backsliding following a seemingly successful electoral process remain for quite some time.

Although the magnitude and intensity of international engagement may not necessarily be the same, support for democratization processes in postconflict settings should not be terminated simply because a reasonably successful election has occurred. At the same time, we should not lose sight of the opportunities afforded by peace accords and the fact that elections with significant international involvement are an important tool available to policymakers and negotiators.

Recognizing the constructive role elections can play in a postconflict situation, the authors correctly shift attention to considerations of timing, modalities, and costs. Meaningful postconflict elections cannot necessarily be organized to coincide with a military exit strategy. Nor does it make sense to compromise basic democratic principles if a key goal of the postconflict election is to lay the basis for the evolution of a democratic society. Finally, the expenditures required for a successful postconflict election, particularly where there are scheduling constraints, are often immense and divert resources from other critical areas of economic and political reconstruction.

A final comment about events in Cambodia, which have taken a serious turn for the worse since the body of this report was completed. In developing lessons for the future, we must avoid applying a superficial analysis to the overall impact of international involvement during the critical period surrounding the 1993 elections. More important, the international community, including the United States and the United Nations, should not use setbacks as an excuse to avoid further engagement in postconflict peacemaking. While the risk of failure in these politically sensitive situations must be acknowledged from the outset, isolationism and abstention are not viable alternatives in today's interdependent world. Rather, we must attempt through studies such as the present one to learn from our experiences so as to minimize the prospects of failure in the future.

I congratulate CDIE for this excellent study, which I hope will receive urgent consideration by the international community.

LARRY GARBER
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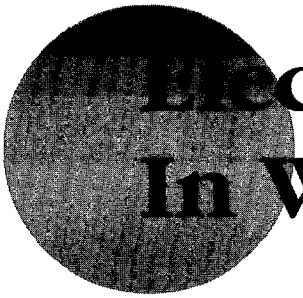

# Elections In War-torn Societies

## Chapter 1

*Numerous factors have contributed to the resolution of civil wars the world over. Among them: the end of the Cold War, growing war fatigue, decline of war support from superpowers, international mediation, and the realization by leaders of warring factions that war would not necessarily achieve their objectives. Peace accords have been signed and carried out in countries as diverse as Angola, Cambodia, and Nicaragua. There is, moreover, new hope for the peaceful settlement of many existing conflicts.*

An essential element in all peace accords signed to end internal conflicts has been the provision for "free and fair" elections. The warring factions, often under outside persua-

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Prepared by Krishna Kumar, Center for Development Information and Evaluation, U.S. Agency for International Development, and Marina Ottaway, Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies.



sion and pressure, agree that the contentious issue of political legitimacy would be settled by ballots and not bullets and that elections would determine who should represent the people and rule the country. Furthermore, in cases where an appropriate constitutional framework for democracy did not exist, elected representatives would draft the new constitution. It was universally assumed that by paving the way for democratization, elections could also promote reconciliation among former warring politicomilitary groups. Consequently, postconflict elections have been held in the past and are likely to be held in the future in postconflict societies.[1]

The international community has generally supported such elections with enthusiasm and hope.[2] It has provided technical and financial assistance to plan and conduct them.

[1] The expression *postconflict societies* refers to countries in the aftermath of civil war. Such wars could end as a result of a peace accord signed by the warring parties, as has been the case, for example, in El Salvador and Mozambique. Or they could end out of outright victory of one party over the other(s), as happened in Ethiopia. The essential feature is that civil war is over for all intents and purposes. The term *war-torn society* is treated here as a synonym for postconflict societies.

[2] The term *international community* here refers to all bilateral and multilateral agencies, intergovernmental organizations, international nongovernmental organizations, philanthropic organizations, relief agencies, and private sector firms involved in development, conflict resolution, and humanitarian assistance.

Moreover, it has sent observers to monitor elections to ensure their integrity and transparency. It has also intervened to resolve disputes among contesting parties, to pressure reluctant parties to accept election outcomes, and to promote a smooth transition of power. International assistance has undoubtedly been critical to the successful conduct of elections.

## *Why This Evaluation?*

The all-encompassing involvement of the international community in postconflict elections has led to a much better understanding of the special problems and challenges these elections entail. Many reports cover specific programs or elections. But whereas they provide good detailed information about individual cases, they usually lack a comparative perspective. Furthermore, most evaluations were written immediately after the completion of a specific program or immediately after an election. They thus cannot examine the program's effect on subsequent developments in these countries.

As a result, large gaps remain in our understanding of the nature and effectiveness of electoral assistance programs and the impact such programs have on subsequent political developments and the overall reconstruction process. In fact, members of the international community, particularly bilateral and multilateral agencies, have at hand little empirically grounded knowledge they can use to formulate their overall policies and design programs in this area. Such a situation hardly promotes the best use of the limited resources available to donors.

In late 1996, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) conducted a program evaluation to fill this gap. The evaluation was the first comprehensive attempt to analyze critically the experience of USAID and other international organizations in supporting postconflict elections. It concentrated on six countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The evaluation asked the following three sets of questions about postconflict elections:

- *Planning and conduct of elections.* Who took the initiative for elections? What were the objectives and expectations? How were the elections planned and conducted? What problems attended the planning and implementation processes? What were the results of the elections? How were they perceived and accepted by the contending parties?

- *International assistance.* What was the nature of international assistance? How did the assistance affect the conduct and outcome of elections? What problems did the international community encounter in delivering its assistance? What have been the strengths and limitations of international assistance programs?

- *Effects of postconflict elections on democratization and reconciliation.* How did elections promote or hinder these processes? What factors and conditions affected the impact of elections on democratization and reconciliation processes?

**The international community has generally supported such elections with enthusiasm and hope.**

This synthesis report presents the findings, conclusions, and lessons of the six country evaluations conducted by CDIE and a subsequent review of those evaluations in a November 1996 workshop organized by CDIE.

## *Contexts And Features*

Postconflict elections are more complex than routine elections, because they are designed to achieve multiple objectives. Furthermore, they are held under much more difficult conditions. Postconflict elections are meant to

**Postconflict elections are more complex than routine elections, because they have multiple objectives.**

- Consolidate peace, by providing the former combatants with a legitimate arena for competition

- Create a legitimate government that can be recognized internationally, thus facilitating the flow of outside assistance for reconstruction and development

- Further the cause of democracy by enabling people to choose their own government and also by educating the citizenry about the meaning and practice of democracy

These objectives are interrelated, but they are not always mutually compatible, at least within a limited time frame. For example, in societies deeply divided along ethnic lines, elections may aggravate existing tensions rather than promote reconciliation, even while paving the way for the installation of a democratically elected government.

Postconflict elections are held under very difficult conditions. The political, economic, and social landscapes of the countries in the aftermath of civil war are hardly conducive to democratic contests for power. Politically, these societies are highly polarized, with deep mutual distrust and antagonisms among former adversaries. The transformation of politicomilitary movements into viable political parties remains at best incomplete at the time of elections. Often ex-combatants are not demobilized, posing the threat of revived hostilities if one of the parties to the conflict is not satisfied with the elections outcome. In many cases, parts of the country remain under the administrative control of a rival militia, impeding the free movement of people.

The norms of free press and media hardly exist, and access to electronic media is often controlled by the government. Most important, the commitment of the leaders of the rival political groups to the democratic process remains at best questionable; the signing of peace accords does not necessarily signify a change in deeply held beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and patterns of behavior of the leaders of the warring factions.

Harsh economic realities put an additional strain on a fragile political system in the aftermath of a peace accord. High inflation, massive unemployment, food shortages, and a shattered institutional and physical infrastructure tend to erode public confidence in political institutions. The high—and often unrealistic—expectations generated by the peace accord remain unfulfilled, contributing to widespread frustration.

A further problem is that war-torn societies usually lack even rudimentary institutional infrastructure for

elections. In many countries, elections were never held in the past; in others, elections took place but were usually manipulated. So election laws, voter registries, electoral commissions at the national and local levels, and administrative structures to manage elections are virtually nonexistent. Little or no technical expertise exists in the country for planning and conducting elections. Therefore, an institutional infrastructure has to be created from scratch within the stipulated time frame.

Under such difficult conditions, the possibility of massive fraud and cheating is always present, as is that of a return to violence. Postconflict elections thus require significant international involvement and high visibility to promote transparency.

## *Evaluation Design And Methodology*

In designing this evaluation, CDIE considered the features and contexts of transition just listed. Three criteria were used to select the countries.

First, elections had to have been held in the country at least two years before the study. There is often a period of euphoria after elections that can prevent an objective assessment of electoral assistance. Intermediary organizations as well as outside experts are often too involved to reexamine their assumptions and evaluate their conduct. This criterion was also necessary to examine the impact of elections on democratization and reconciliation processes in the country. Two years are not a sufficient time for a definitive analysis of such effects, but they can give an indication of the direction of change.

Second, all three developing regions—Africa, Asia, and Latin America—had to be represented. Such a geographic dispersion was required to identify distinctive cultural and contextual variables that might impinge on both the conduct and outcomes of elections. Thus, two countries in Latin America, one in Asia and three in Africa were included in the sample. As Africa has experienced such a large number of civil wars, half of the case studies looked at this region.

Third, relevant records, documents, and other material had to be available. Before selecting case study countries, CDIE conducted computer searches to locate material on elections in different postconflict societies.

After careful analysis, CDIE selected Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua for its case studies. CDIE then prepared a comprehensive research design. It was discussed in a workshop in early 1996 attended by 10 international experts with rich experience in postconflict elections. The research design was revised and expanded in light of those discussions.

CDIE commissioned well-known scholars from the academic community to prepare case studies. All but one had observed the specific election for which they prepared the case study. The experts relied on three additional sources of information. First, they used published and unpublished reports, documents, and other information CDIE identified and gathered through computer searches and individual contacts.

**War-torn societies usually lack even rudimentary infrastructure for elections.**

Second, they conducted interviews with informed individuals. Finally, they themselves possessed extensive documentation and information because of their own interest and involvement in the countries.

The case studies were presented and discussed in a workshop in November 1996. They were later revised by the authors to incorporate criticisms and suggestions.

# Chapter 2
# The Country Context

The six case-study countries shared one common characteristic: they had all experienced a protracted period of civil war, which came to an end through a negotiated agreement in five cases and through a military victory in the sixth (Ethiopia). In all countries, the elections marked a transition not only from authoritarianism to potential democracy, but also from war to peace. But beyond these limited, though important, similarities, the countries varied significantly in the nature of the conflict, the character of the competing political groups, the level of foreign intervention and influence, and the degree of experience with democracy.

## *Angola*

A potentially wealthy oil- and diamond-producing country, Angola has been at war since 1961, when a liberation struggle against the Portuguese first broke out. There had never been any elections, either under Portuguese colonialism or after independence, until 1992.

The Angolan anticolonial movements were unable to create a united liberation front at the time of independence in 1975. War broke out immediately between the two major movements competing for power, the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) and the União Nacional Para a Independencia Total de Angola (Unita). The MPLA, an urban-oriented movement that drew much of its support from better educated Angolans, took control of the government. Unita drew its support predominantly from the more rural southern part of the country.

The movements also differed in their ideological orientation and organization. The MPLA was a Marxist–Leninist movement, but it was too wracked by internal conflict to successfully establish the centralized organization typical of such parties. Unita presented itself as an anticommunist, prodemocracy organization but was centralized and authoritarian. Its leader, Jonas Savimbi, dominated the movement.

External support for the rival groups complicated the Angolan civil war. The MPLA received Soviet and Cuban assistance, including Cuban troops. South Africa in turn supported Unita with troops and matériel. The United States also assisted Unita. Congress suspended aid to the movement in 1976 but restored it in 1985.


In December 1988, an agreement between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa was reached with the help of the United States and the Soviet Union. It led to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. The agreement de-internationalized the civil war, but it did not bring it to an end because of continuing enmity between the MPLA and Unita. After two years of difficult negotiations, both sides signed a peace agreement on May 31, 1991. The United States, the Soviet Union, and Portugal acted as facilitators in the negotiations and later monitored implementation of the agreement. (The place of the Soviet Union was eventually taken by

Russia.) The agreement called for demobilization of MPLA and Unita troops, formation of a new joint national army, and the holding of elections no later than September 1992.

Despite a United Nations presence (the UN Angola Verification Mission —UNAVEM), the combatants never completely demobilized, and that created a dangerous imbalance. International assistance removed the logistical obstacles to elections but could not change the *political* situation. Elections were thus held under extreme political tension, with Unita leader Jonas Savimbi stating openly that he would not accept elections results if he lost. When initial election results showed the MPLA was winning, Unita returned to war.

**Organizing the elections [in Cambodia] was a major logistical undertaking.**

## *Cambodia*

From its independence in 1955, Cambodia managed to maneuver its way through the turmoil in the region with minimum damage under the leadership of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. But in March 1970, Sihanouk was deposed, and the country's sovereignty, already violated by North Vietnam with its sanctuaries and staging areas, was shattered by American air strikes and by the incursion of American and South Vietnamese troops in the east. In 1975 the radical communist Khmer Rouge seized power, proclaiming the country Democratic Kampuchea. After 42 months of sanguinary rule that led to the death of about one fifth of the population, the Khmer Rouge fell to the Vietnamese in December 1978. The Vietnamese-installed government included a united front of ethnic Cambodians living in Vietnam, disaffected Khmer Rouge members, and other Cambodians who had sought refuge in Vietnam.

Resistance to the new government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) grew rapidly. In 1982 an alliance of communist and noncommunist opposition groups was formalized as the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge dominated the coalition because it had the strongest army. The monarchist Unified National Front for an Independent, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (Funcinpec) was also a significant member.

The Cambodian conflict was deeply enmeshed in the Cold War and the Sino–Soviet rivalry in Asia. Since the Vietnamese government, and thus the People's Republic of Kampuchea, enjoyed Soviet support, China backed the Khmer Rouge. The United States and the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) backed the noncommunist opposition. Since the communist and noncommunist opposition to the PRK were united in the coalition government, the United States, China, and Asean were on the same side of the struggle. U.S. support, therefore, benefited the Khmer Rouge as well. Furthermore, the United States refused to extend diplomatic recognition to the PRK and to allow its representative to be seated at the UN. By default, the United States was forced to continue recognizing the toppled Khmer Rouge government of Democratic Kampuchea.

Attempts to negotiate an end to the conflict proceeded on two levels: 1) bilateral negotiations between Sihanouk and Prime Minister Hun Sen of the PRK, beginning in 1986,

and 2) multilateral negotiations including all Cambodian parties as well as the UN and representatives of other involved countries in 1988. The end of the Cold War and the multilateral negotiations led to the Comprehensive Political Settlement in Cambodia (known as the Paris Agreement) of October 21, 1991.

The settlement created a transitional Supreme National Council, including six members of the Cambodian People's Party (which had been installed by the Vietnamese as the governing party to replace the Khmer Rouge) and six members representing the resistance groups. The Supreme National Council delegated to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) all powers necessary to ensure implementation of the Paris Agreement. UNTAC was responsible for demobilization of the combatants, organization of the elections, and supervision or control of administrative structures. Its mandate would expire after the elected Constituent Assembly approved the constitution and transformed itself into a national assembly. The role of the United Nations was much broader in Cambodia than in any of the other countries under discussion.

Organizing the elections was a major logistical undertaking, given the destruction of infrastructure and the large-scale displacement of the population. The complete absence of a democratic tradition made free elections even more difficult. Furthermore, demobilization failed. The Khmer Rouge refused to allow UNTAC in the areas it controlled, and it demobilized no troops. The government army, estimated by the UN to number about 130,000, demobilized only 42,000 men, many of whom remained in village militias. Funcinpec and other groups demobilized only token numbers. Yet despite these and other problems that forced a postponement, the elections were held successfully in May 1993. The Khmer Rouge boycotted the voting but did not try to disrupt it.

## *El Salvador*

The civil war in El Salvador developed against the background of rural dislocation, landlessness, and poverty resulting from economic transformation. As in many Central American countries, a socialist-oriented insurgency developed on the one hand and a military counterinsurgency, alternating between repression and reform, on the other. The endemic conflict escalated during the 1970s, pitting clandestine left-wing organizations against paramilitary groups formed to prevent labor organization and strikes.

**Electoral politics did not put an end to the civil war.**

During the 1980s the conflict intensified into civil war with the creation of a Cuban-supported military alliance of guerrilla groups, the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) and the resurgence of right-wing death squad violence. The victims of the conflict were mostly civilians. An estimated 75,000 people died during the civil war. In the mid-1980s 427,000 people were internally displaced and 250,000 were living in Mexico and other Central American countries. Perhaps a half million more fled to the United States.

At the same time, a regime transition was taking place, with elections playing an increasingly important role in the country's politics during the

1980s. The Christian Democratic Party and the rightist Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Arena) were the major parties in this period. But electoral politics did not put an end to the civil war. The leftist insurgency continued, despite the reformist policies of the Christian Democrats and the repression by Arena. So did the work of the death squads. Although it was the party most closely associated with the death squads, Arena could not completely control them.

**Virtually all political parties participating in the process were organized along ethnic lines [in Ethiopia].**

Despite the severity of the war, a base of electoral politics existed on which a plural democratic system could be built once the fighters agreed to lay down arms. Negotiations started after the defeat of the Christian Democrats in the 1988 legislative elections and the inauguration in 1989 of President Alfredo Cristiani of Arena. After a long process and several intermediate accords, the final peace agreement was ratified on January 16, 1992. The most difficult issues in the negotiations were land distribution and reorganization of the military and the police. The general change in the world political climate encouraged the progress of negotiations. Specifically, the Procedure for the Establishment of a Firm and Lasting Peace in Central America, signed by the Central American presidents in 1987, symbolized the change in the regional political context. UN mediation also contributed to the conclusion of the agreement.

There was no rush to hold elections. First, more than two years were allocated to carry out the peace agreement, demobilize the FMLN guerrillas, and purge and reorganize the armed forces and the police. The process proceeded more or less on schedule. Bargaining resolved the many problems that arose during implementation of the agreement. By late 1992 demobilization had been completed. The FMLN was registered as a political party pledged to respect the constitution.

Elections were held in March 1994 (and runoffs in April). Organizing and implementing these elections was difficult. The climate of suspicion between former enemies led to a slow, cumbersome process with multiple checks and balances at every step of the way. This "institutionalized distrust" marked the issuance of identity papers to citizens, voter registration, setup of polling stations, and every other step necessary to hold elections.

## *Ethiopia*

The Ethiopian postconflict elections were unique among these case studies in that they followed not a negotiated peace agreement but a military victory. Contrary to all other cases, elections were held not nationally at first, but at the local and regional levels. The Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), with minimal help from other ethnic liberation movements, won the war against the regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam. With Mengistu fleeing into exile and his army routed, the victorious TPLF contended in the elections not against its former enemy, but against its weak former allies. Virtually all political parties participating in the process were organized along ethnic lines—with rival pro- and anti-TPLF organizations competing to represent each ethnic group. The pro-TPLF parties were grouped into the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), tightly controlled by the TPLF.

In May 1991 troops of the TPLF occupied Addis Ababa, as Mengistu fled the country and his army disintegrated. In a meeting in London before the overthrow of Mengistu, followed by a second meeting in Addis Ababa in July, political parties agreed to the formation of a government of national unity dominated by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). A transitional charter was also approved. The parties agreed that municipal and local elections would be held within three months, followed by elections for a constituent assembly, approval of a constitution, and, finally, parliamentary elections. The local and regional elections were subsequently postponed until June 1992.

Although Mengistu's army had ceased to exist, rival armed groups remained in the country. The TPLF/EPRDF controlled the largest military force, which had defeated Mengistu. The Oromo Liberation Front, the most important of these armed groups, had a much weaker army. In addition, smaller armed groups operated in various parts of the country. While the July 1991 agreement called for the cantonment of rival troops before the elections, it provided that a part of the TPLF troops would serve as the national army during transition. EPRDF took advantage of this provision to assert its military dominance.

Political tension marred election preparations. Institutions functioned poorly, and the cantonment of troops was partial at best. The lack of past experience in competitive elections, and the limited international involvement compounded the situation. Irregularities occurred in the registration of voters, and the opposition parties were often prevented from registering their candidates. These factors helped prompt the Oromo Liberation Front to withdraw from the elections on the eve of the balloting and to decamp its troops. Elections went ahead anyway, but they were not competitive multiparty elections.

## *Mozambique*

Presidential and legislative elections of October 1994—the first multiparty elections in the country's history—consolidated the end of a civil war that lasted some 15 years. They were primarily a contest between the two organizations that had been locked in war: the Marxist–Leninist Frelimo (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) and the South Africa–supported Renamo (Resistencia Nacional Moçambicana). Frelimo led Mozambique to independence and then continued in power as the sole legal political party. Renamo was a guerrilla group that had engaged in a war of destabilization without scoring a decisive victory. It was a purely military movement without a political structure. It was ill prepared to participate in democratic elections.

**Elections consolidated the end of a civil war that lasted some 15 years.**

A peace agreement signed in October 1992 made the elections possible, after years of negotiations in which intermediaries—in Africa, Europe, and the United States—played major roles. Depriving the Mozambican civil war of its old ideological content and helping bring the peace agreement to a conclusion was the new international context of the 1990s: what had started as an east–west conflict between Frelimo and Renamo had become a domestic struggle for power that no other country was interested in financing.

Nicaragua exemplifies successful postconflict elections.

The peace agreement was signed just as the elections and the peace process in Angola were unraveling. From the outset, the international community was determined to apply in Mozambique the lessons learned from Angola. It had unusual leverage in Mozambique because it financed more than 60 percent of the Mozambican budget, fed a large part of the population, and even funded the transformation of Renamo into a political party. Some $18 million was eventually contributed to the Renamo trust fund for that purpose.

The accord called for demobilization of the Mozambican army and of the Renamo guerrillas. It also prescribed reintegration of the combatants into civilian life, formation of a new army incorporating personnel from both sides, and the holding of elections within one year. Implementation was to be monitored by the UN Operation in Mozambique (UNOMOZ), and also by four special commissions that included representatives of the UN, the United States, and many European and some African countries. In addition, an Aid-for-Democracy Group, which included the UN Development Program and various Western countries, supervised election preparations and coordinated donor assistance through an elections trust fund.

Despite ample financing and the overwhelming international involvement, implementation of the peace agreement was plagued by lack of political will by the leadership of the two sides. Both Frelimo and Renamo were slow in cantoning their troops and in opening up to the other party the areas they controlled. The elections were thus postponed for a year, with the international community deciding to foot the bill of the UNOMOZ mission rather than risk a disaster like the one in Angola.

The delay, together with continuing assistance and pressure from the international community, enabled successful elections to be held in October 1994.

## *Nicaragua*

Like El Salvador, Nicaragua exemplifies successful postconflict elections that did not depend entirely on the intervention of the international community but built on prior experience with elections, though flawed ones.

In 1979, forces of the Marxist-oriented Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) toppled the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle. The Somoza family had ruled for 43 years. The regime had long since worn out any welcome not only among the FSLN but among Nicaraguan society at large. The Sandinistas, though, were the only organized opposition military force. An alliance between revolutionary and more moderate groups fell apart in 1981, leaving the Sandinistas in power.

During the 1980s, the economy took a sharp downturn owing to many factors. For one thing, the country was still recovering from the devastation caused by a 1972 earthquake. Adding to that was the destruction caused by the war against Somoza, the economic policies of the Sandinista regime, the embargo imposed by the United States, and the war against the U.S.–supported Nicaraguan Resistance—the contras. More than 15 percent of the country's population became displaced during that time.

The Sandinista government organized multiparty elections in 1984, but it sought to control the process and reduce competition. Some opposition parties did participate, winning almost one third of the seats. Observers, however, judged the elections to be substantively flawed, though technically correct.

The changing international situation, a regional framework for peace orchestrated by Central American presidents, and economic pressure led the Sandinistas to open negotiations with the contras. The parties reached a cease-fire agreement in 1988. In early 1989 the UN and the Organization of American States pledged to provide observer missions for the forthcoming, regularly scheduled elections. The United States agreed to stop military, but not humanitarian, aid to the contras.

In August 1989, President Daniel Ortega agreed to changes in the election and media laws to ease a democratic transition. At the same time, civilian opposition groups promised to call for the demobilization of the contras.

The postconflict elections were held in February 1990. Candidates were fielded by the Sandinistas, the National Opposition Union (UNO—a coalition of more than 10 political organizations), and by a number of smaller political parties. Violeta Chamorro, presidential candidate of UNO, had taken part in the resistance to Somoza and had thus cooperated with the Sandinistas immediately after Somoza's departure, although she quickly became disillusioned with their political approach. The elections were not a continuation of the military confrontation by other means. The contras were so marginalized at this point that demobilization was not considered a necessary condition for elections. In fact, the contras did not even participate in the process.

**The Sandinista government organized multiparty elections in 1984, but it sought to control the process.**

# CHAPTER 3
# Conduct and Outcome Of the Elections

All postconflict elections largely followed a similar pattern: The parties to the conflict entered into a peace agreement, which included a commitment to multiparty elections. . . . Electoral institutions were organized. . . . An attempt was made to demobilize or at least encamp the armed groups, including the government army. . . . Laws concerning elections, political parties, and the media were enacted or amended. . . . Voters and then candidates were registered. . . . Elections were held. The international community provided major support for these tasks. Despite these similarities, the conduct of elections and their outcomes varied significantly among countries.

## *Initiative For the Elections*

In all the cases, the initiative for the elections came from both internal and international pressure. Internal pressure came largely from two forces: political parties and movements in the opposition that saw democracy as a way of gaining power, and organizations of civil society committed to the principles of democracy and human rights. Significant though less concentrated pressure also came from the population at large. Exhausted by war and ready for change, the people were anxious to participate in elections.

International pressures were both generalized and specific. The generalized pressures derived from the decline and then disappearance of the Soviet Union and from the end of the Cold War, which removed the international dimension from all these conflicts. Outside powers no longer had an interest in supporting one or another party. They were anxious instead to see the strife settled. In Central America, furthermore, regional agreements and organizations created a new political climate for the entire region. Specific pressures were exercised by countries and international organizations helping to mediate the conflicts, conclude peace agreements, and organize elections. The United States played an important role in negotiating the peace agreements and supporting the election process in all case-study countries.

**The initiative for the elections came from both internal and international pressure.**

Commitment to elections varied greatly among the local political actors. Opposition groups with the weakest military position generally supported elections most strongly. By the same token, parties in power were in general more reluctant to enter a process that might lead to their defeat. Further, willingness to participate in the elections did not automatically signal willingness to accept democracy. Usually, the parties that lost the elections resisted accepting the outcome initially, leveling accusations of fraud instead.

## *Timing Of the Elections*

In most cases, the timing was unrealistic. Elections had to be postponed in Cambodia, Ethiopia,

and Mozambique. In Angola the timetable was rigidly locked into the peace agreement, and elections took place as scheduled, despite the failure to demobilize. El Salvador, one of the two countries with the most successful elections, allowed the longest period—27 months—between the signing of the peace agreement and the elections. The short preparation time in Angola and Ethiopia, by contrast, contributed to unsuccessful elections.

Nicaragua was the only country to hold elections earlier than originally envisaged and also successfully. The scheduled election date was November 1990, but when the Sandinistas accepted the need to open the political system to a fair contestation they moved the elections forward to February. Since the country had held multiparty elections before, and the contras were not a significant threat to stability, the time was sufficient.

The pressure for early elections came (depending on the circumstances) from either the opposition or incumbent government. In Angola, Unita originally negotiated for a one-year transition period, hoping to capitalize on the discontent of a population exhausted by war. But the ruling MPLA wanted a three-year transition to prolong its hold on power. In other cases, though, the incumbent party was also anxious to have early elections—in Nicaragua, to prove its democratic good faith,

**Table 1. Timing of Agreements and Elections**

| Country | Date of Peace Agreement | Scheduled Election Date | Actual Election Date | Months from Agreement to Elections (Planned) | Months from Agreement to Elections (Actual) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Angola | Bicesse agreement signed in Lisbon on May 31, 1991 | late 1992 | September 29–30, 1992 | less than 18 | 16 |
| Cambodia | Paris Agreements October 21, 1991 | early 1993 | May 23–28, 1993 | about 16 | 19 |
| El Salvador | Chapultepec Agreements January 1992 | 1994 | March 21, 1994<br>April 24, 1994 (runoff) | about 24 | 27 |
| Ethiopia | Transition Charter of July 1991 | October 1991 | June 21, 1992 | 3 | 11 |
| Mozambique | General Peace Agreement October 1992 | October 1993 | October 27–29, 1994 | 12 | 24 |
| Nicaragua | Central America Peace Plan signed February 15, 1989 (Esquipulas II) | November 1990 by constitution | February 25, 1990 | 22 | 12 |

and in Ethiopia, to take advantage of its own superior organization and the disarray of opposition groups.

The international community was anxious to terminate transition processes that often stretched over years of negotiations. This community also wanted to reduce the costs of a prolonged international presence. Thus, it favored early elections and in some cases accepted an election timetable that was unrealistic even by its own assessment. This happened in Angola and Ethiopia.

## *Design and Planning Of the Elections*

In all six cases, the elections were held under very difficult technical as well as political conditions. In five of them, far-reaching international support brought the logistical problems under control. That resulted in elections that were technically acceptable, if not problem-free. In Ethiopia, however, where there was a much lower level of involvement by the international community, the elections were administratively more problematic.

### Electoral Institutions

Superficially, the electoral institutions established with the support of the international community were similar. In all countries, a national election council composed of the representatives of the major political parties and some supposedly neutral technocrats was responsible for organizing the elections. Regional and local elections councils (the terminology varied from country to country) were responsible to the national organization. At the lowest level, the machinery consisted of polling-station officials, usually supported by representatives of the political parties. The impartiality of all these electoral institutions was, in theory, ensured by the mutual controls exercised by the party representatives and by the professional commitment of the technocrats to fair elections.

In reality, the functioning of the electoral institutions varied considerably among countries. The need for representation of all political parties, coupled with the lack of expertise inevitable in postconflict elections, made electoral institutions cumbersome everywhere. Two issues were particularly important: 1) the degree of neutrality of the electoral institutions and 2) the degree of involvement of donor agencies and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

In general, neutrality was better ensured by the reciprocal controls exercised by representatives of political parties than by the professionalism of the technocrats. In Mozambique, for example, personnel of the Technical Secretariat for the Administration of the Elections were judged by foreign observers to be more politicized than the national election council itself. Highly problematic, particularly in first-time multiparty elections, is the lack of available elections officials committed to the integrity of the process rather than to a party.

As a result, the more serious violations of neutrality arose when electoral institutions failed to include all major parties. Ethiopia provides the most extreme example. Local and provincial election councils were

**Box 1.**
**Unrealistic Timetables**

In late May a preassessment mission to Angola jointly conducted by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the International Republican Institute concluded that "the prospects for conducting meaningful elections as scheduled for September 29 and 30, 1992, are dubious." Nonetheless, elections were prepared in a few months, leaving no time for anything except the most basic tasks.

formed far too late, leaving the organization of the elections in the hands of government officials. Opposition parties were not represented in many cases; and at the local level the supposedly neutral "representatives of the people" on the three-person councils invariably turned out to be politically close to the incumbent party.

The international community was highly involved in supporting the election process except in Ethiopia. In Angola, Cambodia, and Mozambique, the elections could not have taken place within the designated time frame without external assistance. The UN missions to these three countries, as well as U.S. and other NGOs, assumed leading roles and responsibilities. The situation was slightly better in the two Central American countries, where some infrastructure for elections, though flawed, existed.

**The only real contestants were the organizations that had confronted each other in war.**

## Electoral Systems

The choice of electoral systems generally has significant political repercussions. An electoral system can encourage all sides to abide by elections results or aid the formation of a government of national reconciliation. Conversely, it can make reconciliation more difficult. The experience of the six cases shows, however, that political conditions in the country have an even greater effect than the electoral system.

With the sole exception of Ethiopia, all countries held elections at the national level, either for the legislature or for both the legislature and president. (Some countries also held local elections.) All elected their legislature on a system of proportional representation. Angola, El Salvador, Mozambique, and Nicaragua also held presidential elections. In Angola, El Salvador, and Mozambique the constitution required a second round of presidential elections if no candidate received an absolute majority in the first round. The runoff elections were never held in Angola, where hostilities resumed instead.

The system of proportional representation, as expected, encouraged the participation of even small parties and the formation of new ones everywhere. In most cases, though, the only real contestants were the organizations that had confronted each other in war. In Angola, for example, 18 political parties participated in the parliamentary elections and 13 candidates competed for the presidency, but about 90 percent of the vote went to the MPLA and Unita or their presidential nominees. Similarly, only Frelimo and Renamo factored significantly in the Mozambican vote count. Proportional representation, in other words, did not change the nature of the contest in the short run.

In Nicaragua and Cambodia, the elections were followed by unusual power-sharing compromises in the formation of the new government. Parliamentary systems are considered to be more conducive to such compromises. Nicaragua had a presidential system, but that did not prevent President Chamorro from sharing power by appointing a prominent Sandinista to lead the restructuring of the military. In Cambodia the compromise reached by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP—the party installed by the Vietnamese to re-

place the Khmer Rouge) and Funcinpec (a royalist party) went beyond the normal formation of a coalition government in a system of proportional representation. There, *two* prime ministers were appointed. The arrangement—with one prime minister from the CPP and one from Funcinpec—if not unconstitutional, was at least *a*constitutional. Power-sharing and compromise thus were the result of political expediency, not the design of the institutions. The long-term effects of the electoral systems may, however, be different.

## Sequencing of National And Local Elections

Five countries held their first postconflict elections at the national level, choosing new legislatures and, except for Cambodia, presidents. Ethiopia was the exception, starting the process of political transformation at the local and regional level and following it up the next year with elections for a constituent assembly. This is an approach often suggested as suitable for countries emerging from conflict. The experience of Ethiopia raises questions about the downside of such a bottom-up approach. The emphasis on local politics strengthened parties with a narrow ethnic basis, virtually precluding the emergence of national parties. The government also encouraged the ethnicization of politics as part of an overall strategy to reorganize Ethiopia into a federation of ethnic states. As a result, the Ethiopian elections were very divisive.

**Table 2. Electoral Systems**

| Country | Election Type | Electoral System |
|---|---|---|
| Angola | Presidential and Legislative | *For president:* simple majority. *For Parliament:* proportional representation |
| Cambodia | Legislative (Council of Ministers to come from parties represented therein) | *For National Assembly:* proportional representation |
| El Salvador | Presidential, Legislative, municipal, and Central American Parliament | *For president:* ballotage (runoff between two candidates with largest plurality in case no one has majority). *For Legislative Assembly:* proportional representation (method of successive residuals). *For municipals:* all seats to party obtaining plurality. *For Central American Parliament:* based on at-large national deputies |
| Ethiopia | Regional councils and district councils | *For councils:* first past the post |
| Mozambique | Presidential and legislative | *For president:* simple majority. *For National Assembly:* proportional representation |
| Nicaragua | Presidential, National Assembly, municipal, and two regional Autonomous Councils | *For presidential:* simple majority. *For National Assembly:* proportional representation. *For municipal:* mixed majority-proportional representation formula |

## Problems In Elections Preparation

Organizers faced three kinds of problems in planning elections. First, strictly logistical problems were due to poor physical infrastructure and weak government administrative structures. The expertise and resources of the UN, bilateral donor agencies and international NGOs solved these problems in an impressive fashion.

Second, certain issues had political implications directly related to the holding of elections: registration of voters, legalization of political parties, registration of candidates, and training of polling-station officials and monitors. Most such disagreements and tensions were resolved with appropriate technical solutions. The experience of the international community in other transition societies proved valuable in preventing minor disagreements from becoming major political conflicts. The lack of trust among parties led many countries to adopt unwieldy procedures. In El Salvador, for example, the "institutionalized distrust" that surrounded the elections made it cumbersome and time consuming for ordinary citizens to vote.

Finally, there were ongoing political conflicts among major parties. The peace accords in Angola and Cambodia, and the formation of a transitional government in Ethiopia before the elections, left major contentious problems unresolved. To some extent this was also true for Mozambique. Formal preparation could continue in all cases, because of international supervision in Angola, Cambodia, and Mozambique and the government's military and administrative control in Ethiopia. This created a paradox: a logistical feat by the international community made possible elections that would have otherwise been prevented by the political conflict. However, the elections could not solve the underlying political problem. This led to renewed conflict in Angola, a political deadlock in Ethiopia, and a political compromise in Cambodia.

## *Conduct Of the Elections*

Four countries did not meet an essential condition for elections—demobilization of the competing armies and creation of a unified military force. Ethiopia and Angola held elections while the major parties were still heavily armed, and this contributed to the resumption of hostilities after elections. In Cambodia, demobilization was also incomplete, but the international presence maintained peace until the two major parties formed a joint government. It is important to note, however, that the de facto control of the military by the Cambodian People's Party precluded the formation of a government that was not acceptable to it. Nicaragua also held elections before the demobilization of the contras had started. But it did not pose serious security problems, because the contras had lost much of their power and credibility by that time and other parties were committed to the electoral process. In any case, the limited progress in demobilization and reintegration in four countries was hardly conducive to the conduct of free and fair elections.

**Box 2.**
**In El Salvador, 'Institutionalized Distrust'**

On the eve of the 1994 elections, President Alfredo Cristiani remarked that the electoral framework of the 1980s had been based on distrust. Proof of this can be seen in 1) cumbersome procedures for registration; 2) an exaggerated agglomeration of voting stations into an insufficient number of voting precincts; 3) a requirement that people vote where they are registered, not where they live; and 4) public transportation being unavailable on election day. These obstacles contribute to erosion of the one-person, one-vote principle by making it more difficult for ordinary citizens to vote. It is institutionalized distrust that lurks behind many of the idiosyncracies of the Salvadoran electoral system.

## Voter Registration

Voter registration was a difficult technical task as well as a bone of contention among the competing parties. Practically all countries lacked even adequate census data, much less voter registries. The problem was compounded by the vested interest political parties had in excluding certain segments of the population—usually members of ethnic groups or social strata more likely to support the opposition. International organizations demonstrated a remarkable ingenuity and skill in overcoming these barriers and in establishing a reasonably fair system. They often succeeded in persuading the concerned countries to maintain the openness of the voter registration process by extending the deadline.

Voter registration required striking a balance. The tightrope was between, on the one hand, the need for strict documentation to ensure that only those who met the agreed criteria could register, and, on the other, encouraging wide participation through an accessible system. El Salvador, which insisted on strict documentation and required its citizens to go through a long, cumbersome registration process, had lower voter participation. Case studies indicate that despite obvious problems, a substantial proportion of eligible voters was registered.

## Violence and Intimidation

In all six countries, violence and intimidation were a bigger problem in the months and weeks before the elections than during the voting. In many cases, political parties tried to control the voters' registration process, so as to exclude supporters of rival parties. Violence and intimidation were also used to keep candidates from campaigning freely everywhere. In Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, and, to a lesser extent, Mozambique, the existence of "no go" areas controlled by a single party was a major problem.

Familiar forms of electoral fraud such as buying of votes and stuffing ballot boxes were much less important, or at least unreported by observers. It is possible such forms of fraud require a degree of organization and funding not available to parties in these postconflict elections.

This pattern of voter intimidation has implications for the optimum international monitoring of postconflict elections: the international community needs to center its attention less on election day and more on early assessments of the ongoing preparations.

**Voter registration was a difficult technical task as well as a bone of contention.**

## *Outcome Of the Elections*

Citizens in all case-study countries demonstrated a remarkable eagerness and enthusiasm to vote. Voter turnout was very high everywhere, ranging from a low of 85 percent of registered voters in Nicaragua to a high of 92 percent in El Salvador. This is even more impressive when considering that voters often had to walk long distances and then wait for long periods, as inexperienced polling-station officials tried to move the crowds through the process. Questions have at times been raised about the extent to which people in these countries comprehend the process. It is clear from these elections that they understood the value of making a

choice, even though they may not have been familiar with the operations of a democratic system.

The outcome of the elections can be analyzed at two levels, technical and political. Table 3 provides the elections results.

Technically, with the possible exception of Ethiopia, elections were a success. Despite extremely difficult situations surrounding these elections—ranging from the destruction of physical infrastructure and records to the legacy of bitterness and hatred rooted in civil war—elections were held with reasonable fairness and little violence during the voting.

Five elections were accepted by the international community as "free and fair" or at least reasonably so under the conditions of a war-torn society. The elections in Ethiopia were not formally certified by the international observers, whose only role was confidence-building. But foreign diplomats in Addis Ababa accepted the results, although the elections had not been competitive. An evaluation report by the National Democratic Institute issued afterwards painted a less than satisfactory picture of the elections.

In all elections, however, irregularities occurred and were reported by the international observers. Unfortu-

**Table 3. Technical Success Elections Results (% of Votes)**

| Country | Presidential Results | Legislative Results | Local Results |
|---|---|---|---|
| Angola | MPLA (dos Santos)—49.57<br>Unita (Savimbi)—40.07 | MPLA—53.74<br>Unita—34.1 | |
| Cambodia | | Funcinpec—45.47<br>CPP—38.23 | |
| El Salvador | (second-round results)<br>Arena—68.32%<br>CD[a]-FMLN-MNR[b]—31.68% | Arena—46<br>CD-FMLN-MNR—26<br>PDC—21 | Municipal<br>Arena—79<br>PDC—11<br>CD-FMLN-MNR—6<br>PCN—4 |
| Ethiopia | | | EPRDF coalition won 95.8% of the seats |
| Mozambique | Frelimo (Chissano)—53.3<br>Renamo (Dhlakama)—33.7 | Frelimo—44.33<br>Renamo—37.78<br>UD—5.15 | |
| Nicaragua | UNO (Chamorro)—54.7<br>FSLN (Ortega)—40.8 | UNO—56 (% of seats)<br>FSLN—42 (% of seats) | *(of mayors)*<br>UNO—75<br>FSLN—24 |

[a]Convergencia Democratica
[b]Movimento Nacional Revolutionario

nately, reporting by the media and even statements issued by foreign governments and international organizations did not always reflect the complexity of the situation. The "free and fair" designation received more attention than the more nuanced evaluations by the observers.

## Political Outcome

Except in El Salvador, the losers were initially unwilling to accept the election results. The major parties, when defeated, at first claimed fraud. International pressure, however, prevailed on all parties to accept results in most cases. In Mozambique, for example, Renamo sensed defeat and threatened to pull out of the electoral process on the eve of the voting. But strong diplomatic pressure and an extra $1 million contribution to the Renamo trust fund persuaded it to stay in. In Angola, by contrast, Unita utterly refused to accept defeat. Its leader, Jonas Savimbi, expected from the outset to win the elections. He declared repeatedly that only massive fraud could deprive him of victory. He returned to war when election returns showed the MPLA had won.

Politically, the elections in El Salvador and Nicaragua were a clear success. The outcome was accepted by the opposition, and democratically elected governments were formed. In Nicaragua the new government made concessions to its erstwhile adversaries: it signed a "protocol of transition" and appointed a Sandinista as head of the armed forces to oversee the demobilization of the contras, alleviating the Sandinistas' security concerns and contributing to their surrendering political power.

By contrast, the elections in Angola and Ethiopia seem to have ended in failure. The former precipitated a return to civil war, whereas in Ethiopia the most important opposition parties, including the Oromo Liberation Front, pulled out of the process a few days before the elections because of their frustration with government recalcitrance. The elections thus consolidated the power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front as a de facto single party. That left the country with neither a power-sharing government nor a loyal opposition.

Elections in Mozambique and Cambodia require a more nuanced evaluation. In Mozambique the formal political outcome of the elections was positive. However, the degree of intervention by the international community, the dependence of Renamo on foreign funding, and the intense pressure that had to be exercised by the international community to keep the election process on target—these all raise questions about the political will of Mozambican leaders and the technical capacity of Mozambican institutions to sustain democracy independently.

**The major parties, when defeated, at first claimed fraud.**

In Cambodia the outcome of the elections was exceedingly complex. Funcinpec won the largest number of seats and theoretically could have formed a coalition with smaller parties, leaving the Cambodian People's Party in the opposition. But the CPP controlled the civilian administration and the military, and it was not inclined to play the role of loyal opposition. A tense and dangerous impasse was resolved with the nomination of Norodom Sihanouk as

head of state and the formation, temporarily, of a joint government by Funcinpec and CPP, characterized, oddly, by the appointment of two prime ministers. Adoption of a new constitution invested the arrangement on a permanent basis.

In conclusion, in all countries the political parties' commitment to a democratic transition remained weak in the immediate aftermath of the elections. The role of the international community was crucial in the early days in persuading all political parties to accept the election results, even when the vote counts did not live up to their expectations.

**Table 4. Outcome of Elections**

| Country | 'Free and Fair' by International Observers | Losers' Reaction | New Government Formed According to Democratic Principles |
|---|---|---|---|
| Angola | yes | reject and return to war | no |
| Cambodia | yes | negotiate power-sharing pact | ? |
| El Salvador | yes | accept | yes |
| Ethiopia | no formal certification | opposition withdraws before elections, fighting | ? |
| Mozambique | yes | accept, but election-eve crises | yes |
| Nicaragua | yes | obtain concessions, then accept | yes |

# Chapter 4
# Consequences

The international community supported postconflict elections on the assumption they could not only settle the contentious issue of political legitimacy in war-torn countries but also ease the transformation of countries with a long tradition of authoritarian regimes into pluralistic democracies. This chapter examines this underlying assumption by discussing the consequences of the elections for democratization and reconciliation processes in the six countries.

Democratization and reconciliation are processes, not events. Democratization can be viewed as the process through which countries with authoritarian systems (and in the case-study countries with a history of armed conflict) contain the competition for power within the limits established by representative institutions and the law. For countries with a history of authoritarian government and no tradition of rule of law, this is a difficult transition and is bound to take time. Designing new democratic institutions, adopting new laws, and holding elections are part of this process. The most difficult part, however, comes after the elections, when the parties have to undertake their activities within the limits prescribed by the law and the institutions, even if they lost the elections.

In postconflict societies, democratization and reconciliation processes are intertwined. In fact, reconciliation can be viewed as an integral part of democratization over the longer term. Reconciliation in countries emerging from civil war does not imply either absence of conflict or elimination of the causes of conflict, both of which are likely to remain Utopian ideals. Rather, it is the transformation of armed conflict into political conflict. And further, it is the containment of this political conflict within the limits of what is permissible under the law and does not undermine the institutions. It means commitment to capture political power through ballots and not by bullets.

We should, at the outset, mention two caveats about the consequences of elections for democratization and reconciliation. First, postconflict elections are only one part of a complex set of factors and conditions that affect the democratization process in a war-torn society. These include as well the process and scope of the peace accord, existing political structures, social and cultural traditions, the nature of the political leadership, and the interests and involvement of outside powers. There is no way to isolate the effects of elections from those of other factors and conditions in a policy-oriented evaluation study. Second, democratization, especially in the conditions of war-torn societies, is a long-term process, beset with ups and downs, progress and stagnation, and even regression. The countries that seem to be making visible progress at present may turn into failures, and vice versa.

**In postconflict societies, democratization and reconciliation processes are intertwined.**

## *Democratically Elected Governments*

In all cases, elections contributed to the establishment of elected governments. All case-study countries lacked democratic traditions. The notion of competitive, multiparty elections was alien to most of them. Although El Salvador and Nicaragua had competitive elections during the 1980s, these were open to government manipulation (in Nicaragua) or did not encompass the entire political spectrum (in El Salvador). All the remaining countries were one-party states. Postconflict elections were competitive and judged "free and fair" in five countries. Only in Ethiopia did a combination of government repression and boycott of the elections by the opposition parties keep the elections from being competitive. Given the conditions from which these countries started, this success rate was no small achievement.

**Most of the countries have maintained a semblance of democratic system.**

Even more significantly, the elected governments have survived under heavy odds—with the exception of Cambodia. There, an uneasy coalition between the CPP and Funcinpec broke down, and Hun Sen, the second prime minister, staged a coup in July 1997, ousting the first prime minister, Prince Norodom Ranariddh. While no one can contend that they have fully adhered to the norms and values of Western democracies, few would deny that most of them have maintained a semblance of democratic system. However, political developments in two countries have been disquieting. In Angola progress toward democracy has been reversed abruptly by Unita's decision to return to war rather than acting as the loyal opposition in the elected parliament. Although Unita has again signed a peace agreement with the ruling party, its real intentions remain suspect. The situation is not very different in Ethiopia, where the ruling party's intransigence and the major opposition parties' boycott of the transition and subsequent elections have prevented the evolution of a genuine multiparty democracy.

## *Building And Strengthening A Democratic Base*

In addition to installing elected governments, case studies indicate that postconflict elections have helped create minimal institutional structures for the functioning of pluralistic democracies. Three institutional developments deserve special mention here.

### Transformation Of Political Parties And Politicomilitary Movements

The preparation for and conduct of elections aided in the evolution of political parties in most of the countries. The authoritarian ruling parties had no alternative but to be more open and participatory. For example, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the CPP in Cambodia, and Frelimo in Mozambique tried to broaden their mass base. All accepted democratic pluralism and underwent organizational transformation to adjust themselves to the new realities.

More important, politicomilitary movements such as the FMLN in El Salvador and Renamo in Mozambique transformed themselves into

political parties. In general, such movements appeared more willing to do so when they saw no realistic hope of a military victory. But when politicomilitary movements entertained the hope they could use their military power, as was the case with Unita in Angola, they were not willing to solely become political parties. In Ethiopia the political evolution of the EPRDF into a political party remained ambiguous: having won the war, the organization could become a political party while retaining its army under the guise of a national army.

The international community provided financial assistance to resource-starved existing, as well as newly formed, political parties to enable them to contend in elections. It also gave them technical assistance to build their capacity to select candidates, organize election campaigns, and monitor election outcomes. In Mozambique, for example, two trust funds were established—an $18 million fund to help Renamo, the principal opposition group, and a $3 million fund to help other small, registered political parties. Access to these funds not only aided the organizational transformation of these parties but also provided additional inducement for them to participate in elections. In all cases, political parties gained experience in political organization and competitive elections.

**Box 3. Evolution of Democratic Parties in Cambodia**

Cambodia illustrates the nature and process of the evolution of political parties as they relate to elections. To adhere to the terms of the peace accord, the ruling Khmer People's Revolutionary Party underwent a drastic transformation before the elections. In an extraordinary congress held in October 1991, it changed its name to the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and made radical changes in its organization and style of functioning. The party committed itself to multiparty democracy and embraced economic liberalization, eschewing communist dogma. Since then, it has solidified its base and has emerged as the most powerful party in the country.

Funcinpec, which got a plurality of seats in the 1993 elections, was hardly a coherent political party before elections. It lacked a provincial political cadre, well articulated ideology, and national program for economic and social development. It came into power primarily because of the people's distrust of the CPP and because of its identification with the popular King Sihanouk. But the party has not been able to consolidate its organization and develop leadership at the local levels. Dissatisfaction with the leadership style of First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh, divisions among the top leaders, and limited attention to party building by the leadership have prevented it from emerging as a dominant political force in Cambodia today.

The Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), the third largest party, has its origin in the refugee camps in Thailand. It derives its support from expatriate communities in the United States and France. It has brought into the government some of the best-trained expatriate staff but has suffered from leadership splits. Many of its members have defected to other political parties. Recently, breakaway members have organized a splinter faction more closely allied to the CPP.

## Emergence of NGOs Promoting Democracy And Human Rights

Peace accords and subsequent election activity spawned the growth of nongovernmental organizations committed to promotion of human rights, political liberalization, and the rule of law. These NGOs received technical and financial assistance from the international community, and especially from the United States. Moreover, many of them actively collaborated with international organizations in civic education, voter training, and other democracy-promoting activities. Such collaboration gave them valuable experience and expertise.

Cambodia, for example, has seen a remarkable growth of democracy-promoting NGOs, partly through the

**Radio broadcasts reach even the remote corners of a country; the radio is generally the only source of political news.**

support of overseas Cambodians. These Cambodians had moved to Western countries during the civil war, internalizing democratic values and norms, which they wanted to implant in the Cambodian society. Two human rights organizations, Ad Hoc and Lichado, have a combined membership of more than 100,000. But Cambodia is not unique. Human rights organizations have emerged in every case-study country. Political freedom, an independent press, and continual contacts with international human rights organizations have led to heightened concern with human rights, benefiting local organizations.

There are indications that the emphasis of many donor agencies and international organizations on gender parity indirectly strengthened the position of NGOs working for women. In Mozambique, for example, several organizations such as the Organization for Mozambican Women; Women, Law and Development; the Women Lawyers Association; and the Rural Women Association were involved in voter education and the political mobilization of women.

But democracy-promoting NGOs remain fragile in many countries. Many have little grass-roots support and tend to operate only at the national level. Some remain dependent on the international community for financial support, with little prospect of becoming self-sufficient. As initial enthusiasm and outside support waned, many organizations disappeared. Those that survived and managed to diversify their source of funding, however, are likely to remain a lasting force in their country.

## Growth of Free Media

Before elections, neither the three African countries nor Cambodia had an independent press. Whatever newspapers and periodicals existed were either owned or censored by the government. The situation was only slightly better in Nicaragua. One essential prerequisite for elections was freedom of the press. Consequently, governments in all case-study countries had little alternative but to abolish press censorship and permit the emergence of independent or party-controlled newspapers and periodicals.

Freedom of press has largely survived the postelection period. The two Central American countries continue to have a vibrant press. Up to the coup of July 1997, Cambodia also enjoyed a free press. An independent press is still also accepted in the African countries, but intimidation, harassment, and extralegal sanctions on critical journals are not necessarily concerns of the past. In Ethiopia, for example, the government routinely arrests reporters and editors as a warning.

Because of high illiteracy, transportation bottlenecks, and the relatively high cost of newsprint and printing machinery (which are often imported), the printed media reach mostly urban populations. By contrast, radio broadcasts reach even the remote corners of a country because of the easy availability of transistor radios. In rural areas of Africa and Asia, the radio is generally the only source of political news. Elections have helped achieve an opening, if limited, of radio and television to political parties and political discourse.

During election campaigns, state-owned radio and television stations provided time to various political parties to articulate their ideology and programs. In this way, the monopoly of the ruling party to electronic media was undermined, though not eliminated. Taking Nicaragua as an example, political parties were given access to channel 2, the state-owned television station. Such access was undoubtedly a significant development in a country where publicly owned electronic media had been largely an instrument of political propaganda and manipulation for the ruling clique. Moreover, many restrictions on privately owned radio and television stations were relaxed, enabling them to contract freely with political parties. During elections, each radio station in Nicaragua was obligated to guarantee each party a minimum of three minutes a day. Privately owned television and radio stations now exist in Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua.

Many international donor agencies have provided technical assistance to help make the print and electronic media more professional, exposing them to the norms of freedom and objectivity.

**Box 4. Growth of Independent Media in Mozambique**

Mozambique has seen the emergence of an independent media since the signing of the peace accord in 1992. At that time, a faxed news sheet, *Mediafax*, sent to subscribers Monday through Friday, was the only example of an independent newspaper. Electoral activity—particularly the growth of political parties, election campaigns, and civic and voter education programs—created opportunities for the emergence of a free press.

Now the country has two regular weekly newspapers and a series of news magazines, including a monthly journal published by Renamo. Provincial and regional newspapers are also beginning to appear, with Manica province serving as home to a regional newspaper serving central Mozambique. In addition, the Catholic Church and different Protestant evangelical churches have financed and developed a series of local radio stations, broadcasting in Portuguese and different local languages. Many of these stations broadcasted civic education and voter training programs during elections.

## *Building An Electoral Infrastructure*

Elections also helped build or strengthen the institutional infrastructure for elections in practically all countries. First, in most of the countries, new legislation was passed or the old drastically revised to permit democratic participation. Such legislation was usually crafted with the assistance of international experts. It covered requirements of registration of voters, candidates, and parties; the role of election commission and administration; voting systems; and general election procedures. In most cases, the electoral law was designed for the sole purpose of administering postconflict elections. Even then it served as a reference point for future elections.

Second, the establishment of autonomous and semiautonomous national election commissions was a major innovation in Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, the Supreme Electoral Councils too acquired additional resources and expertise; following the Latin American model, they were accepted as the fourth branch of the government. Further postelection reforms were made in the operations of election commissions in El Salvador, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua.

Third, postconflict elections resulted in developing voter registries. Whereas serious deficiencies existed in the voter registries in El Salvador and Nicaragua, others had no voter registries at all. Postconflict elections helped correct these deficiencies. In fact, El Salvador, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua have taken further steps to improve and update their voter registries. Little has been done since the elections to update registries in Angola, Cambodia, and Mozambique. In Mozambique, for example, the Technical Secretariat for Electoral Support has not attempted to register new voters after the 1994 elections. It has not transferred provincial registries and documentation to the headquarters, nor has it systematically monitored them in provincial and district locations. The result: a loss of valuable information.

Finally, elections have contributed to building some technical expertise in most of the countries. Thousands of election workers received training in voter registration, managing polling booths, and counting ballots in each country. For example, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia trained more than 50,000 Cambodians as election officials. These people constitute a good resource for future elections. Unfortunately, little has been done in Cambodia and the three African countries to provide election officials additional training or keep them involved in ongoing programs for the promotion of democracy. In fact, in these countries there has been little contact with trained personnel. A fresh start will have to be made for future elections.

Although the overall effects of postconflict elections seem to be positive in building infrastructure, these effects could have been more significant had the international community paid greater attention to sustainability. As indicated earlier, international assistance was usually more geared toward conducting elections than toward building long-term institutional capacity.

**Box 5. Electoral Capacity-Building in Ethiopia**

The postconflict elections in Ethiopia, which left much to be desired in their planning and implementation, had one positive effect: acceptance by the government and donor agencies of the need for electoral capacity-building. The international community provided generous postelection assistance for this purpose. Ethiopia now has the legal and infrastructural capacity to conduct multiparty elections freely, fairly, and effectively—when multiparty democracy returns to Ethiopia to put this capacity to test.

## *Public Education In Democracy*

There is little doubt that postconflict elections exposed the population to the nature of democratic contestation. The civic and voter education programs were the first attempts in the history of the three African countries and Cambodia to seriously explain the nature of democratic engagement to voters. The turnout rates in sample countries have been unusually high, indicating the population's yearning for peace as well as an interest in change. The defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua demonstrated in the most concrete sense the truth that in democracies, ballots can be more powerful than bullets.

## *Elections and the Reconciliation Process*

In the aftermath of postconflict elections, three countries (El Salvador, Mozambique, and Nicaragua) have made significant progress toward reconciliation. The former warring groups have been more or less integrated into the emerging pluralistic democratic system. They continue to follow democratic means to capture political power. In the two Central American countries, several factors contributed to this successful

outcome. They include exposure, though limited, to democracy; absence of deep ethnic or geographic cleavages; genuine commitment to the peace process; and the positive influence of and pressure from other states. In Mozambique, successful demobilization and reintegration of armies, heavy dependence on foreign assistance, war fatigue, and discontinuation of outside support to rebels appeared to be major contributing factors.

In Angola, fighting erupted immediately after the voting. Having lost the election, Unita tried to capture power through military victory. As it had managed to keep its fighting force largely intact despite initial demobilization, it was able to mount a large-scale, though ultimately unsuccessful, offensive against the government. However, as Unita still controls rich mining areas, it is in a position to prolong civil war. Unlike Angola, Ethiopia enjoys relative peace but without reconciliation. The intransigence of the ruling party and the opposition's boycott of the elections have undermined both democratization and reconciliation.

The case of Cambodia is more complex. The Khmer Rouge, who refused to participate in the elections, remained commited to a violent overthrow of the government. Gradually, though, they became marginalized because of internal strife and defections. However, the uneasy coalition between CPP and Funcinpec also disintegrated. The second prime minister, Hun Sen, staged a coup ousting the first prime minister, Prince Ranariddh. The situation has been confused since then.

## Premature Closing Of Democratization And Reconciliation

A word is necessary here about premature closing of the democratization process as a result of postconflict elections. Ethiopia offers a good example. Following the 1992 elections, the dialog between the EPRDF and the opposition virtually ceased. Parties that were members of the transitional government before the elections stopped cooperating and went back to war. Several international efforts at reopening talks failed to achieve results.

The failure of an election does not always completely stop democratization and reconciliation. Despite serious setbacks—failed elections and the resumption of war—the MPLA and Unita in Angola have never completely closed the door to dialog. Negotiations led to the signing in 1994 of the Lusaka Protocol, which seeks to build on what was accomplished in the past and restart the process where it came to a halt. Progress in implementing the agreement has been painfully slow, and relations between the parties remain difficult. As long as discussions continue, however, complete closure has not occurred.

In conclusion, the overall effects of postconflict elections have been positive on both democratization and reconciliation. El Salvador, Mozambique, and Nicaragua can be cited as successful examples. However, elections have failed to consolidate either democracy or peace in Angola and Ethiopia. Cambodia remains a question mark. But even in the countries where elections have not succeeded, they have helped redefine the notion of political legitimacy,

broaden the limits of political freedom, and create a framework for coexistence that can be adopted in the future.

Often the frustration with postconflict elections, particularly in Africa, results from unrealistic expectations entertained by the international community. By itself, a single election cannot transform the political culture of a society, nor can it resolve deep-rooted social and economic conflicts. At best, it can implant the idea of democratic contestation in countries lacking such traditions and give impetus to efforts to build a society based on the rule of law and respect for human rights.

# Chapter 5
# Factors Affecting the Elections And Their Outcomes

In this chapter we identify some of the factors and conditions that seem to have affected the elections and their consequences.

## *International Involvement*

International involvement was a critical factor in the success of peace negotiations, the organization of elections, and the acceptance of the outcome. The end of the Cold War and increased cooperation between the former Soviet Union and Western democracies contributed to effective interventions by the UN and other multilateral organizations. Above all, a renewed commitment to peace and democracy by major powers deprived the warring factions in the six countries of the flow of economic and military assistance that had prolonged these conflicts. The external powers, which in the past had sustained these conflicts, began to exert pressure on the clients to resolve them and promote democracy.

The case studies suggest that without continual pressure and persuasion from the international community, the march toward democratization and reconciliation would have been slowed, if not derailed. USAID and other donors were aware of the need for continual involvement. Consequently, immediately after elections, they were quick to put in place a variety of programs to continue strengthening organizations of civil society and to help the new governmental institutions, such as parliaments, work more smoothly. Equally crucial was the role of the international community in encouraging major parties to continue dialog and mutual adjustment.

## *Democratic Traditions*

The second factor was the presence or absence of democratic traditions. The existence of participatory social institutions was particularly relevant. These included local political units, voluntary associations, an emerging middle class economically independent on the state, a relatively independent media, and competitive elections.

**The international community encouraged major parties to continue dialog.**

The two Central American countries, which had some limited experience with democracy, seem to be making satisfactory progress toward democratization and reconciliation. The remaining four countries had no democratic tradition at all in the management of the state and little tradition of free participation in democratically organized voluntary associations. In all these countries, the progress toward democratization has been halting, and many authoritarian tendencies are still evident. However, none of these countries has yet totally reverted to a totalitarian system. That suggests that some progress toward more open political systems can also be made in those war-torn societies with practically no democratic traditions.

## *Ethnic Cleavages*

Significant ethnic cleavages existed in at least in four countries, and they affected elections and consequent political developments. In Ethiopia, ethnic tensions had escalated from the mid-1970s on. Virtually all political organizations were constructed along ethnic lines by the time of the elections. In Angola the MPLA and Unita had different ethnic constituencies, although neither movement could be considered strictly ethnic. The situation was not much different in Mozambique. In both these countries, ethnic divisions were reflected in voting patterns. The role and power of ethnic Vietnamese was a major issue dividing the Vietnamese-supported CPP and the other parties in Cambodia. Although there were some ethnic tensions in Central America, these were less important than the *class* cleavages that existed.

Ethnic cleavages do not seem to prevent completely democratization and reconciliation. The yearning for peace, the promise of pluralistic democratic institutions, the attempts to restructure the polity to accommodate ethnic identities (as was the case with Ethiopia), and the international presence and assistance—these all may have militated against the potential disruptive effects of ethnic cleavages in Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Cambodia. The situation in Angola remains uncertain.

## *Economic Growth*

The expectation that democratic stability would promote economic growth, and thus alleviate poverty and economic stagnation, helped the democratization process. Moreover, the leaders that came into power after elections were fully aware that future international assistance depended largely on their adherence to essential democratic norms.

In three countries (Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Mozambique) the benefits of political stability were immediate and tangible. All these countries are essentially subsistence economies, and the end of conflict contributed to the revival of agriculture. Service and industrial sectors also grew. The case of the two Central American countries has been slightly different. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, economic reforms, which were essential for long-term growth, entailed significant social costs. The conditions of many vulnerable groups worsened as a result of structural adjustment and economic liberalization, and that put a strain on democratization and reconciliation. The adverse effects of the reforms were partly alleviated, though, by

**Box 6. Different Countries, Different Outcomes**

In El Salvador, war helped make the elections relevant. International assistance and the determination of Salvadoran democrats made the election foolproof. The outcome of those elections made the peace process possible as it installed legitimate governments and helped create a dialectic of peaceful competition between government and opposition. This process put in place a valid interlocutor for the guerrillas to make peace with.

The 1992 elections in Ethiopia undermined reconciliation between the two sides in the war, between opposition parties and the government, and among the ethnic communities. It is clear that these elections disappointed Ethiopians as well as donors and external observers in this regard.

In Angola the reconciliation process started unraveling before the elections, with the failure of the demobilization process. It was further threatened when Unita's leader, Jonas Savimbi, began asserting that only massive fraud could deprive him of victory. By the time the elections were held, the reconciliation process had broken down.

massive U.S. and other economic assistance and by huge remittances sent by Salvadoran expatriates.

## *Demobilization And Reintegration Of Armies*

It is difficult for organizations that started as armed movements fighting each other militarily to turn into political parties willing to limit their rivalry to electoral competition and the enactment of laws. This is almost impossible if the parties remain armed and thus have the option of turning to force to achieve their goals. Significant progress toward demobilization and reintegration of the conflicting forces is thus paramount to the success of elections and democratization.

Case studies indicate that demobilization and reintegration remained a weak link in these postconflict elections. In Angola and Cambodia, demobilization failed despite UN supervision. In Ethiopia the pact between the government and Oromo Liberation Front was not respected and the fighting continued. The examples of Angola and Ethiopia also suggest that forging ahead with elections when the military option is still open is counterproductive, because it can precipitate the resumption of fighting. The consequences of failed demobilization were not as drastic in Cambodia, because war has not resumed. Democratization nonetheless suffered a setback: the power of the Cambodian People's Party remains lodged principally in its control of the military rather than in the votes it received during the elections.

## *Continual Dialog And Negotiations*

Continual dialog between political parties in the period before and after the elections was another factor affecting the political success of elections. All postconflict elections were preceded by negotiations and a peace agreement—this is what made the elections possible in the first place. But in the period between the signing of the peace agreement and the holding of elections, countries differed widely in the extent to which open channels were maintained among the major parties.

In Angola contacts between Unita and the MPLA appear to have been minimal and formal. Thus the mutual distrust was not lessened in any way, a factor that also made it extremely difficult for them to conduct postelection negotiations. By contrast, opposition parties constantly negotiated with the ruling party in Nicaragua to resolve mutual disagreements and to deal with potential conflict. They were therefore in a position to strike a mutually satisfactory bargain after the elections. The situation was not much different in Cambodia, where formal and informal contacts between the CPP and Funcinpec continued during the elections. These contacts facilitated bargaining for power-sharing arrangements between them.

**Forging ahead with elections when the military option is still open is counter-productive.**

# Chapter 6
# International Electoral Assistance

International assistance played an important role in five of the six countries. Although elections could have been held without international assistance in El Salvador and Nicaragua, countries with prior election experience, they would have had less credibility. In Angola, Cambodia, and Mozambique there would have been no elections without international assistance. In Ethiopia the international community played a much less important role.

The governments of Angola, Cambodia, and Mozambique did not have the administrative and financial capacity to organize elections on their own, particularly since the destruction of much infrastructure during the wars made the physical task of moving election material around the country both complicated and very expensive. Demobilization of combatants could not have taken place at all without UN supervision; it remained difficult, and in Angola and Cambodia was ultimately unsuccessful, even under supervision. Finally, international assistance was needed in these countries to bolster the political will of the parties to remain in the process. In Angola, even international intervention was insufficient to persuade Savimbi to accept election results.

The Salvadoran and Nicaraguan governments had the capacity to organize elections without international assistance. Such assistance, nevertheless, remained important. First, it gave much greater political credibility to the elections, making it difficult for any party to withdraw from the process or question the results. Second, it improved the technical quality of the elections, particularly of voter registration, thus broadening political participation.

In Ethiopia the international community played an ambiguous role. It was not deeply involved, had no official role in certifying the elections, and thus had little leverage. At the same time, it encouraged the process and provided some help. In the end, the international community gave an endorsement, though a lukewarm one, to a noncompetitive election.

The situation in Ethiopia was very different from that in the other five countries. Elsewhere, governments and insurgencies unable to crush each other had finally been forced to sign a peace agreement with international mediation. In Ethiopia the government represented the armed insurgents who had won a resounding military victory. Such a government was not inclined to risk losing at the polls what it had won on the battlefield. Elections were thus a tool to legitimize the new government rather than to apportion power among the competitors. Indeed, the question needs to be asked whether it was realistic to expect that in a country without any democratic tradition, a political movement that had just won a war would agree to compete on a level playing field with organizations whose role in defeating

the common enemy was marginal at best. The question also needs to be raised whether international involvement could be expected to accomplish anything under the circumstances.

## *Types Of International Assistance*

International assistance was broadly divided into three categories in all countries: technical and logistical assistance, political assistance, and financial assistance.

### Technical And Logistical Assistance

This assistance was aimed at facilitating elections or making it possible to hold them. It included helping set up and providing technical support to electoral institutions, training polling-station officials, and transporting election material around the country. In some cases, as in Mozambique, the international community did most of the work in these areas. In countries with a stronger administrative structure, the international community assisted domestic institutions. All cases revealed the very considerable technical expertise of international organizations and NGOs in the organization of elections. In Angola and Cambodia, in particular, the international community accomplished remarkable logistical feats.

In some of these war-to-peace transitions, technical assistance extended to the demobilization and reintegration of combatants. International agencies demonstrated less expertise in this difficult area than in organizing elections. One problem was that they consistently underestimated the time necessary for demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants.

**Box 7. Mediation in Nicaragua**

Former president Jimmy Carter's mission to Nicaragua concentrated on conflict resolution rather than on technical aspects of the election process. Carter met several times with government and opposition leaders, before and after the elections. He was most instrumental in helping resolve contentious issues (such as the release of U.S. government funds to the National Opposition Union and the return of Miskito Indian leaders to participate in the election). He also helped with transition arrangements.

**Box 8. In Angola, Curtailed Political Assistance**

Because of the very tight schedule, the National Election Commission and the international community concentrated exclusively on the basic logistical tasks. There was no time to attempt broader democratization projects such as developing civic organizations, promoting an independent press, or carrying out a program of civic education. U.S. NGOs carried out small projects: three weeks of political party training by the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute jointly, and a voter education program by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. By and large, though, the international community directed its effort at overcoming the logistical problems of moving people and matériel around a country with a destroyed infrastructure.

### Assistance To Improve The Political Context

This included training of political party officials, promoting civic education, and strengthening prodemocracy NGOs in general, and in particular those capable of supplying monitors for the elections. In some cases it involved promoting further negotiations among rival parties to solve conflicts that arose during the preparation of elections.

Some of the countries that most needed improvement in the political climate received very little assistance

in this regard. In Angola and Cambodia, for example, demobilization and logistical problems absorbed most of the attention of the international community. Political tasks fell to second priority. Similarly, the short time frame given for election preparation also caused the international community to concentrate their efforts on technical tasks. It is understandable why this happened, but it is also unfortunate.

## Financial Assistance

The narrow technical and broad political tasks undertaken by the international community and the electoral institutions of the six countries were underpinned by international financial assistance. The international community also financed demobilization.

In Angola, Cambodia, and Mozambique the cost of the transition was very high. But comprehensive, and above all comparable, figures are unfortunately unavailable. The cost for Cambodia has been estimated at $2 billion—including the cost of UNTAC. In Mozambique the cost of the elections alone has been estimated at $85 million, with larger amounts spent on the UN mission and demobilization. The Angolan transition was probably cheaper up to the time of the elections, because the UN mission was kept small and the process lasted only 16 months. The failure of the elections, however, produced further high costs for the international community (and of course to Angolans). The UN mission is still operating in Angola in early 1997. This suggests that in evaluating whether the costs of elections are too high, the cost of failure should also be considered.

Postconflict elections in war-torn countries will always be expensive, particularly when all electoral institutions have to be built from scratch. But some of the costs were probably too high and established unrealistic expectations and standards for the next elections. Polling-station officials were in some cases paid salaries that were high in relation to the country's per capita income. And air transport was used frequently to expedite the process. Such expenditure levels can create a dangerous precedent.

The United States contributed significantly to all aspects of these transitions. It was involved to some degree with the negotiations of the peace agreements in all cases and later supported the election effort through international organizations. A major component of bilateral U.S. electoral assistance in all countries was support for what can broadly be defined as civil society. USAID, through organizations such as the National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, and International Foundation for Electoral Systems, promoted voter and more broadly civic education. It also provided training for personnel of local human rights and democracy NGOs, political party officials, and election monitors. When the situation allowed, these activities continued after the elections, becoming part of a sustained effort at promoting democracy.

## *Issues*

Three issues need to be highlighted concerning international assistance to postconflict elections: time frames, political intervention, and sustainability. The latter is potentially the most serious.

## Time Frames

As discussed, in most cases not enough time was allocated to carry out the tasks envisaged. Although the international community did not always establish the timing, it did contribute to the problem by its willingness to compress election preparations into a short time frame. In Angola, for example, a September 29–30, 1992 date was chosen at the insistence of Unita during negotiations. But no elections would have taken place at that time without the international community's decision to make them happen despite insufficient political preparation.

Less dramatically, the problem of time also played on the effectiveness of the broader democratization measures undertaken by donors. For example, it is doubtful that training for political party officials done a few weeks before elections will have much impact, or that rushed civic education projects can do more than teach voters how to cast their vote. Democracy NGOs are aware that civil society programs take time, and they prepare to follow up after the elections. It is important, nevertheless, that preelection programs be specifically tailored to what can be effectively done to help the transition in a short time. For example, an intensive campaign to make sure that voters understand how to mark and fold a ballot may be more important in the last few weeks before elections than broader civic education programs or training for party officials.

**Box 9. Cost of Elections**

The Mozambican elections were expensive. U.S. Ambassador Dennis Jett referred to them as "gold plated." Some of the inflated costs were avoidable.

A more realistic timetable for the implementation of the elections could have eliminated the need for some of the costly helicopter transport. However, this would have increased security concerns. Ballots would have had to have been distributed earlier to the polling sites, then requiring monitors and security. A trade-off was made that sacrificed cost-effectiveness for getting the elections over and done with before the rainy season with maximum security measures.

•••

In Cambodia, polling places were staffed by some 50,000 citizens trained by UNTAC's electoral component and supervised by UNTAC personnel. Many of these officials were drawn from the ranks of local school principals and teachers; they were trained for two or three months and received salaries of $800 for election board "presidents" to $200 for officials who verified voter cards, applied indelible ink to voters' fingers, or otherwise assisted in the voting process.

## Political Intervention

Assistance aimed at improving the political context had to tread a fine line between promoting democracy and promoting particular political parties. In Mozambique, for example, the international community set up a trust fund to finance the transformation of Renamo from a guerrilla movement into a political party. It was argued that there could be no credible elections if Renamo did not make the transition. It was further asserted that Frelimo enjoyed all the advantages of incumbency, including control of the state and its institutions. For the same reason, the international community provided support in Nicaragua not only to prodemocracy NGOs but also to the National Opposition Union. Again, under the circumstances, there were valid reasons for this assistance

Many U.S. programs have strong political implications, with U.S. NGOs engaging in broad democratization efforts. Support for democracy NGOs is often seen by the incumbent government as support for the

opposition. But failure to support opposition parties and NGOs also has political implications, because it can further strengthen the ruling party's power monopoly. The countries where a democratic transition is more problematic (because of chaos reigning in the country, weakness of opposition parties owing to earlier repression, or control by previous single parties over all government resources) are also the ones where prodemocracy programs more easily acquire partisan overtones. Clear criteria need to be established concerning the more political forms of assistance.

## Sustainability

The far-reaching role of the international community raises a question long familiar to agencies involved in economic development programs, that of sustainability. Is the political development represented by these elections sustainable? Or will democratization projects suffer the fate of many concerned with development assistance—namely, fold once outside funding dries up?

The question of sustainability has several facets. First, many of the country studies point with alarm to the disappearance of electoral institutions funded at great expense for the postconflict elections. Further, the limited expertise acquired by polling-station officials and election observers should be preserved and reinforced for the next election and used in continuing democratization efforts—possibly as civic educators—so that their initial expertise will be strengthened rather than lost.

Another issue, a delicate one, is whether civil society organizations that were fostered by the international community during postconflict elections can become self-supporting within a reasonable time frame. This relates not only to the many NGOs that carry out civic education (and which draw their support exclusively from the international community) but of political parties as well. The question is pertinent concerning Renamo—an organization that required a large amount of international financing and other support to function as a political party.

The most difficult question concerns political sustainability. The more the success of the elections was due to international intervention, the more fragile the outcome. The results of the Angolan elections were not respected. In Cambodia, Funcinpec had to accept the de facto power that the Cambodian People's Party derived from its control over the administration and the military. Without continued international involvement, it is doubtful competitive elections will be held in 1998 and thereafter.

In postconflict elections, the tendency by the international community has so far been to do whatever possible to make the elections a success. Unless sustainability is taken into account in designing programs, future elections may still require exorbitant amounts of international support—or be doomed to failure.

**Box 10. Using Leverage in Mozambique**

A principal means for Mozambique's Commission for Supervision and Control and the international community to ensure that Renamo and Frelimo respected their commitments under the Peace Accords process was by using donor resources as leverage.

The Renamo trust fund was established in May 1993 to help that organization with its transformation into a political party and to counterbalance Frelimo's access to public resources for election purposes. Renamo had to believe that it could compete in the elections, or it was feared it would return to using force to obtain its objectives. Fourteen donors contributed to the $18 million fund.

# CHAPTER 7
# Lessons And Recommendations

This chapter presents selected lessons derived from the experience of elections in case-study countries. It emphasizes policy and not technical issues. A set of recommendations, which follow from these lessons for USAID and other donor agencies, is also presented.

## *International Electoral Assistance Is Essential*

The international community made a crucial contribution to these postconflict elections in many different ways. It promoted peace negotiations. It helped maintain peace and security in most countries by establishing a UN mission. It supported demobilization of combatants. And it played a major role in organizing the elections themselves. This section deals specifically with the organization of elections.

Case studies indicate that without substantial international assistance, elections would not have materialized in Angola, Cambodia, and Mozambique, and they would have been less credible in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The Ethiopian elections, which saw the lowest level of international involvement, were also the least credible of the six.

The international community provided three types of assistance. First, it provided financial assistance for planning and holding elections. Second, and equally important, was technical assistance, which the countries desperately needed because of lack of experience and expertise. Finally, the international community provided political assistance in restructuring political parties and strengthening organizations of civil society; at the same time, it enhanced the integrity of the electoral process and the credibility of its outcome by deploying international monitors.

In a climate of deep mutual distrust and antagonism, the international presence helped prevent gross irregularities and widespread fraud. It strengthened the legitimacy of nascent democratic groups and provided a reasonable assessment of the situation to others in the international community. However, in countries where one of the major parties lacked the will to abide by election results, international monitoring was ineffective (as in Angola) or even served to lend legitimacy to noncompetitive elections (as in Ethiopia).

In addition to direct assistance, the international community played

**Box 11. Can the Democratic Transition In Cambodia Be Sustained? Maybe Not**

After the successful coup in July 1997, the future of democratic transition in the aftermath of elections is questionable. The CPP seems bent on keeping the reins of power with total disregard for the democratic process. It has consolidated its hold on military and civilian bureaucracy.

Because of a lack of leadership, Funcinpec, the party that gained the plurality of votes, has largely disintegrated. Although Second Prime Minister Hun Sen has promised to hold elections in 1997, his promise cannot be taken at face value.

another vital though less visible role. Diplomats, donor agency staff, and technical experts constantly mediated between major contestants, exerted subtle and not-so-subtle pressure for ensuring "free and fair" elections, and in many cases persuaded major contestants to accept the voters' verdict. For example, without intense international pressure, it is doubtful the Sandinistas in Nicaragua or the CPP in Cambodia would have accepted the election outcome. Diplomatic interventions were as essential as direct assistance.

**Recommendation:** In cooperation with other international agencies, USAID should continue to provide economic and technical assistance for postconflict elections to promote peace and democracy in war-torn societies. It should also step up efforts to promote dialog and reconciliation among the parties.

**Diplomatic interventions were as essential as direct assistance.**

## *Strategies to Militate Against the Divisive Effects of Elections*

In the absence of a tradition of democratic contestation, elections in the aftermath of civil war can be highly divisive. In practically all case study countries, political parties appealed to parochial loyalties to gain votes. Appeals to ethnic identities were successfully made in the three African countries. In Cambodia, opposition parties openly talked of domination by the Vietnamese minority. Political leaders and parties often advanced unfounded charges against one another in the two Central American countries. There is little doubt that in many instances elections left a bitter legacy, aggravating existing tensions and cleavages.

Case studies point to three measures that can reduce the divisive effects of political contestation. First, the experience of Nicaragua and Mozambique suggests that continual discussions, consultations, and negotiations between the leaders and representatives of the rival parties during the planning and conduct of elections tend to promote a better understanding and appreciation of the opponent's perspective and can resolve many differences. Negotiations on elections rules and practices are particularly important to reinforce commitment to elections and acceptance of their results by all parties. Postelection power-sharing is another issue that should be the object of preelection negotiations. Finally, whenever possible, parties should be encouraged to enter into discussions concerning longer term policy issues.

Second, developing and enforcing a comprehensive code of conduct produces positive results. The process of formulating such a code involves a sustained dialog among rival political leaders, resulting in a broad consensus on complex and controversial issues that may surface later in elections. Moreover, a code prevents isolated noncompliance of electoral regulations from developing into a major political issue. Finally, and most important, it imposes much needed self-discipline and restraint on the behavior of political activists.

Third, civic- and voter-education programs, when efficiently and effectively organized before elections, can help create a positive atmosphere.

**Recommendation:** While planning elections, officials should formulate appropriate strategies to prevent and control the divisive effects of political contestation. Such strategies may involve 1) promoting an ongoing dialog between rival political parties to plan and manage elections, 2) developing a code of conduct for political parties, and 3) designing and implementing extensive civic and voter education programs, starting before elections and continuing in their aftermath.

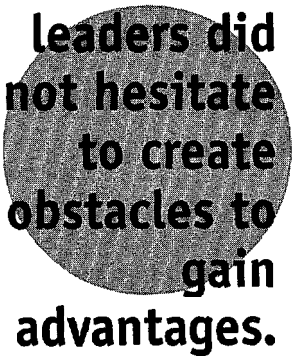
## *Adequate Time And Flexibility*

In Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Mozambique, the original timetables for holding elections were based on unrealistic assumptions. The planners underestimated the roadblocks created by deficient transportation and communication systems, the government's limited capacities, difficulties in donor coordination, and above all, the lack of political will. Political leaders often harbored serious reservations about elections and did not hesitate to create obstacles to gain advantages.

Case studies suggest that stringent time frames had five adverse consequences. First, demobilization could not be completed in several countries. Second, voter education programs often could not be implemented effectively. For example, intermediary organizations—which were engaged in voter education in Angola, Ethiopia, and Mozambique—found it difficult to print necessary literature, train trainers, and reach out to voters in remote areas within the stipulated time. In some cases, civic education, which was necessary in the societies without experience with democracy, could not be initiated at all. Third, limited time partly contributed to a lack of attention to sustainability issues. Experts were under more pressure to meet unrealistic deadlines than to build institutions and infrastructures that could be used in the future. Fourth, stringent time frames inflated the overall cost of elections by forcing reliance on air transport. Finally, the postponement of elections made necessary by unrealistic schedules created further confusion and misunderstandings.

Although stringent time schedules are counterproductive, flexibility must not become an excuse for inaction, lest the momentum of the transition be lost. A longer timetable needs to include target dates for the completion of specific tasks, and pressure must be brought to bear on the parties to move forward.

**Recommendations:** Planners should budget adequate time for planning and conducting elections. The time frame should be based on an in-depth assessment of the existing situation and not on unrealistic political expectations and should include intermediate target dates. Flexibility should be built into the election calendar to deal with unexpected problems or seize fresh opportunities but must not be allowed to become an excuse for inaction.




## *High Costs Of Postconflict Elections*

The cost of elections has been exceptionally high, given the wide-

spread poverty and paucity of resources in case-study countries. The total price tag for reconciliation elections ranged from $40 million to several hundred millions of dollars. Questions have been raised about the wisdom of expending such enormous sums of money on a single event. In the zero-sum game of international assistance, the funds for elections come at the expense of other activities that promote development and democracy. Moreover, it is doubtful that in an environment of ever shrinking budgets for international assistance, considerable resources will be forthcoming for promoting reconciliation elections in the future.

**The total price tag for reconciliation elections ranged from $40 million to several hundred millions of dollars.**

The experience of case-study countries points to a few measures that can reduce the overall cost. First, as suggested earlier, the pressure to organize elections within a very limited time frame often results in wasted resources; thus, a reasonable and flexible time frame can result in considerable economies. Second, election procedures should be designed in line with the country's financial capacity to better ensure that subsequent elections can realistically be carried out. Third, greater use of local manpower and expertise can save resources. The cost of hiring expatriate staff and consultants usually consumes a major share of international assistance. When indigenous experts are not available, donors can try recruiting them from neighboring countries. And fourth, better donor coordination and, if possible, a division of labor among major donors is needed. For example, instead of many countries and organizations sending their own observers to monitor an election, a few may, by common agreement, be entrusted with the responsibility.

**Recommendation:** Planning and conducting elections in war-torn societies is bound to remain an expensive exercise because of shattered physical and institutional structures and unfavorable environments. Notwithstanding, USAID should take steps to reduce their overall costs. The Agency should take a lead in undertaking a study to examine the cost-effectiveness of reconciliation elections and suggest ways to reduce their overall costs without sacrificing efficiency and effectiveness. The goal should be to create electoral mechanisms the national governments will be able to support by themselves in the medium term.

## *'Free and Fair' Elections*

Most international observer missions have become increasingly sophisticated in evaluating elections, issuing nuanced reports that assess both progress made and continuing problems, and take into consideration the perceptions of the major parties and the general population. However, both the political pressures under which the international organizations and foreign governments operate and the reporting by the media often give the impression that elections are simply judged as "free and fair" or "not free and fair." Such assessments have little discriminatory value. El Salvador and Nicaragua, for example, maintained reasonably high election standards, but there were serious misgivings among international observers about the freeness and fairness of elections in Ethiopia. The remaining countries fell between these two extremes. Yet, all these elections were labeled free and fair

by the international community and the press.

**Recommendations:** First, efforts to ensure that all international and domestic observers rely on the same professional criteria in judging elections need to be continued. Since legitimacy of the elections ultimately depends on their acceptance by the parties and observers, these should be publicized.

Second, efforts need to be made to increase the media's sophistication in reporting about elections.

Third, sometimes international organizations and foreign governments have no choice but to accept flawed elections. Not to do so might trigger more violence or undermine the progress that has been made. In such cases they should acknowledge that, though flawed, the elections can play a useful role in postconflict situations.

## *Long-Term Strategic Interventions*

Elections provide only a window of opportunity for democratization in a war-torn society. They are an essential, though not sufficient, condition for sustaining democratization. Indeed, the experience of practically all countries studied indicates that democratization requires the following: continual reconciliation among the former warring parties, reforms in security forces, rebuilding of law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary, observance of human rights, strengthening of civil society, and, above all, rapid economic development alleviating poverty and unemployment.

USAID made considerable investments in democracy-promoting activities in El Salvador, Cambodia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua. Most of the investments have yielded encouraging results.

**Recommendation:** Assistance for postconflict elections should be accompanied by a long-term strategy to nurture the democratization process and a firm commitment of resources by the international community.

## *Preconditions For Postconflict Elections*

The experience of the case-study countries, as well as of other recent war-torn societies, indicates that the success of elections requires both technical and political preconditions. International assistance can make up to some extent for the missing preconditions, but this can be extremely costly. Poor conditions do not necessarily make it impossible to hold elections, but they greatly reduce the chances for lasting results.

**The success of elections requires both technical and political preconditions.**

The following preconditions are crucial to the success of postconflict elections:

- Existence of a state capable of performing the essential functions expected of it. To some extent, international assistance can make up for the weakness of the state, as happened in Cambodia and Mozambique, although such assistance is extremely costly. If the very existence of the state is in doubt, as is the case with many failed states (such as Bosnia, Burundi, Rwanda, and Somalia), international assistance probably

cannot fill the gap, and elections cannot bring political stability or resolve conflicts.

- A working consensus among the former warring parties about national boundaries, the structure and functioning of the government, and relations between national and subnational units. A degree of disagreement on issues other than national boundaries exists in all healthy democracies. However, if there is no working consensus on the essential outlines of a system of government, it is unlikely the losers will accept election results. A party favoring a loose confederal system is unlikely to accept the electoral victory of one favoring a highly centralized system. If the parties cannot reach such basic consensus, international assistance cannot fill the gap. If they are to work, international attempts to promote systems of government entailing a degree of power-sharing—from proportional representation to full-fledged governments of national unity—require a working consensus.

**If the parties cannot reach basic consensus, international assistance cannot fill the gap.**

- A demonstrable political commitment on the part of the major conflicting parties to carry out the agreed-on peace accord or pact. Such a commitment was not visible for Unita in Angola, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and the EPRDF in Ethiopia. The lack of commitment contributed to a less-than-satisfactory outcome to the electoral process. In theory, the international community could make up for the lack of commitment by creating strong peace-enforcing mechanisms. The cost of such an undertaking makes such a solution unlikely.

- Significant progress toward demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. In highly polarized societies, progress in this area is necessary to ensure that the losing party will not be able to resume military hostilities in the face of an electoral defeat. Here, too, strong international peace-enforcing mechanism could be a substitute in theory, but probably not in practice.

**Recommendation:** USAID and other donors should provide technical and material support for elections only if 1) there exists a functioning state; 2) major political parties agree about national boundaries, relationships between national and subnational units, and structure and functions of government; 3) warring parties demonstrate a commitment to implement a peace accord; and 4) significant progress has been made in demobilization and integration of armies belonging to conflicting parties.

## *Interim Alternatives To Early Elections*

Finally, the case studies, as well as the experience of Burundi and Bosnia, suggest the need for fresh thinking on holding elections in the immediate aftermath of civil war and destruction. There are two reasons why early elections in postconflict societies could be counterproductive, postponing rather than accelerating democratization.

First, as indicated earlier, conditions in many postconflict societies are hardly conducive to democratic contestation. These countries are highly polarized and socially frag-

mented. They possess limited institutional capacity for self-governance. In extreme cases, the state as an institution exists only on paper. The internal security situation remains precarious because of unemployed ex-combatants, easy availability of arms and ammunition, and widespread social disorganization. Law-enforcement agencies remain weak, if even they exist, and gross violations of human rights often persist. Moreover, these societies face pressing economic problems that demand immediate action and adoption of policies and programs that are politically unpalatable.

Second, elections can further polarize these societies, increasing rather than moderating political tensions. This happens because parties and candidates appeal to ethnic or tribal loyalties, real or imaginary past grievances, and narrow and sectarian interests to mobilize support.

In countries where preconditions for elections are not met and elections thus entail a high risk of failure, functional alternatives to elections need to be considered. Such functional alternatives would need to satisfy a number of requirements:

1. Entail less risk of return to conflict or consolidation of authoritarian regimes than early elections held under unfavorable conditions.

2. Help consolidate the peace agreement and create an interim mechanism for governing the country until elections are held.

3. Be sufficiently low cost to be sustainable. For this reason, the possibility of a de facto international trusteeship will not be discussed here.

4. Have as the end point the holding of free and fair competitive elections. The time required to get to elections will undoubtedly vary from country to country.

The cases studied offer some indications of measures that could serve as interim alternatives to early elections. For example, they indicate that the countries with the most successful elections were also the ones in which a continuing process of negotiations took place between the original peace agreement and the elections. Such a continuing process helped solve specific problems. It also consolidated the peace agreement and helped develop consensus on basic issues. And it helped the parties learn to work with one another before the elections. This suggests that one functional alternative to early elections may be to continue negotiations on a broader range of issues than those reached in the peace agreement.

The example of Angola is relevant here. After the failure of the 1992 elections and the return to war, new negotiations tried to address the problems overlooked the first time. As a result, the provisions of the 1991 peace accord were supplemented after lengthy negotiations by the 1994 Lusaka Protocol. Negotiations are continuing in 1997. The attempted second Angola transition cannot be considered a success yet, because a final settlement has not been reached. But even a stalled transition is preferable to a return to war; 1994–97 has been better for Angola than 1992–94.

**There are two reasons why early elections in postconflict societies could be counter-productive.**

**Efforts to consolidate peace and generate a consensus should be adapted to each country's most urgent needs.**

South Africa offers another example of the importance of lengthy negotiations in a successful transition under unfavorable circumstances. South Africa took four years to get to its postconflict elections. There were three functional alternatives to early elections. The first were the all-party negotiations, which brought about agreement on a new constitution and on the necessity to form a government of national reconciliation. The second was establishment of peace committees. And the third was creation of "transitional executive councils" to supervise certain governmental functions.

These measures helped consolidate peace. They lent a degree of legitimacy to the existing government that allowed it to continue administering the country until elections with the agreement of all parties. And they opened the way for further democratization. By the time the elections were held, widespread consensus had been achieved on the rules of the political game. More important, a culture of bargaining had been created.

Circumstances vary from country to country. Efforts to consolidate peace and generate a consensus that will eventually allow elections should be adapted to each country's most urgent needs. For example, South Africa (and to an extent even Angola) had a functioning government in place. A country like Liberia, where a power vacuum exists, faces a much more urgent problem of creating new structures to govern the country until elections are held. Formation of a caretaker technical government might provide a mechanism in a transition period. Such a government would be supported by the international community and would also share responsibility on specific issues with transitional councils representing all parties. Some aspects of the South African experience may be applicable elsewhere.

Transitional institutions need to initiate programs of political liberalization and economic reconstruction. Political liberalization requires promotion of the rule of law and respect for human rights, creation of free media, tolerance of opposition, transparency in governmental operations, and promotion of civil society. Economic reconstruction should concentrate on rehabilitating physical and institutional infrastructure, reviving agriculture and industry, and stabilizing economic reforms. Such efforts are likely to create a more favorable environment to nurture democratization.

Given the risk entailed in early elections in postconflict countries and the high domestic and international costs of failed elections (Angola is a reminder) functional alternatives need to be considered more aggressively.

**Recommendation:** In cooperation with the State Department and bilateral and multilateral agencies, USAID should explore functional alternatives to early elections in extremely polarized societies (such as Burundi, Somali, or Rwanda) for an interim period. During this time peace can be consolidated, essential state institutions can be rebuilt, and a climate for democratic contestation can be created.

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